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MONTH IN REVIEW: AUGUST 1998

Reports, Testimony, Correspondence, and Other Publications

Highlights

Medicare

The audit initiative to ensure that Medicare is not billed twice for services performed at teaching hospitals is valid and has recovered more than \$67 million at four institutions. However, GAO believes that a risk-based approach targeting institutions most likely to violate Medicare billing rules is more practical than plans to audit all major teaching hospitals. Page 9.

Aircraft Carriers

Conventional and nuclear aircraft carriers are both effective in fulfilling U.S. forward presence, crisis response, and war-fighting requirements and share many characteristics and capabilities. However, a GAO analysis shows that the life-cycle costs of nuclear carriers are significantly higher than those of conventional carriers. Page 20.

Defense Spending

Military spending on prime contracts, from weapons research and development to construction projects, has for years been concentrated in a few states. In 1997, four states—California, Virginia, Texas, and Florida—accounted for 40 percent, or \$81 million, of all Defense Department prime contract awards and compensation. Page 20.

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Month in Review: August 1998

Agriculture and Food

Testimony

Food Assistance: Computerized Information Matching Could Reduce Fraud and Abuse in the Food Stamp Program, by Robert E. Robertson, Associate Director for Food and Agriculture Issues, before the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Nutrition, and Foreign Agriculture, House Committee on Agriculture. GAO/T-RCED-98-254, Aug. 5 (eight pages).

The Food Stamp Program is one of the nation's largest welfare programs and the largest single program administered by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). In fiscal year 1997, more than \$19 billion in food stamps was provided to 23 million recipients. Any program of this magnitude is vulnerable to fraud and abuse, and the Food Stamp Program is no exception. Although the Food Stamp Program has been troubled by the participation of ineligible recipients and the improper use of benefits, USDA has succeeded in reducing the overpayment error rate in recent years and is taking steps to address food stamp trafficking—that is, the exchange of food stamps for cash or other nonfood items. This testimony (1) provides an overview of the scope of fraud and abuse in the program, (2) discusses the ways in which computerized information can be used to identify and reduce it, and (3) comments on proposed legislation to reduce fraud and abuse in the program.

Economic Development

Community Development: A Survey of CDFI Organizations' Use of Performance Measurement

GAO/RCED-98-255, Aug. 25 (39 pages).

In economically distressed communities, where access to credit and investment capital through conventional sources is often limited, private for-profit and nonprofit development financial institutions (CDFI), such as nonprofit loan funds and community credit unions, provide lending and investment services. Recognizing the proven ability of CDFIs to identify and respond to communities' financial needs, Congress created the CDFI Fund in 1994 to support investment in and assistance to CDFIs. GAO surveyed 925 CDFI organizations that were members of a national CDFI trade organization, had applied to the CDFI Fund for an award, or had been certified by the Fund as a CDFI. This report presents the results of GAO's

survey, describing the characteristics of the 623 CDFI organizations that responded to the survey and discussing the extent to which they reported using performance measurement to assess progress toward their goals.

Energy

Department of Energy: Lessons Learned Incorporated Into Performance-Based Incentive Contracts

GAO/RCED-98-223, July 29 (12 pages).

As part of its efforts to reform its management of contract operations, the Energy Department (DOE) in 1994 began using performance-based incentives in contracts for managing and operating its facilities. These incentives are intended to better link contractors' fees to the satisfactory accomplishment of specific tasks. However, DOE's Office of Inspector General has identified problems with the Department's implementation of performance-based contracting at several facilities. In addition, DOE's October 1997 departmentwide assessment of performance-based incentives in contracting identified other problems and recommended corrective actions. The assessment also cited examples of the successful use of performance-based incentives. This report reviews performance-based incentives at DOE's Hanford, Idaho Falls, Rocky Flats, and Savannah River sites to determine (1) the extent to which DOE has incorporated lessons learned in developing its fiscal year 1998 performance-based incentives, (2) whether these incentives incorporate the baseline measures in DOE's 10-year plan for environmental cleanup and how the fees are allocated to the incentives; and (3) how DOE evaluates completed incentive measures and determines their effectiveness.

Federal Oil Valuation: Efforts to Revise Regulations and an Analysis of Royalties in Kind

GAO/RCED-98-242, Aug. 19 (28 pages).

In fiscal year 1997, the Minerals Management Service (MMS) collected \$4.1 billion in royalties from 22,000 oil and gas leases on federal lands. By law, the states in which the leases are located receive a share of the royalties collected, which are calculated as a percentage of the value of the oil or gas that is produced. The value of much of the oil from federal leases has been based on posted prices—offers by purchasers to buy oil from a specific area. However, recent evidence indicates that oil is now often sold

for more than the posted prices, suggesting that the value of oil from federal leases and the amount of federal royalties should both be higher. Proposed regulations would reduce the use of posted prices to value much of the oil from federal leases and would instead require that other, oftentimes higher, prices be used. According to MMS, the proposed regulations would boost federal royalties by as much as \$66 million annually. States generally support the proposed regulations, while the oil industry generally opposes them. As an alternative, the oil industry has suggested that MMS instead be required to accept, as the federal government's royalties, a percentage of the actual oil and gas produced from federal leases, rather than cash royalties based on the value of that oil and gas. MMS would then sell this oil and gas to generate revenues. This report discusses (1) the information used by MMS to justify the need for revising its oil valuation regulations; (2) how MMS has addressed concerns expressed by the oil industry and states in developing these regulations; and (3) the feasibility of the federal government's taking its oil and gas royalties in kind, as indicated by existing studies and programs.

Financial Institutions

CFTC Enforcement:

Actions Taken to Strengthen the Division of Enforcement

GAO/GGD-98-193, Aug. 28 (42 pages).

An internal review of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission's (CFTC) Division of Enforcement, completed in March 1995, found weaknesses in the division's overall management. This report discusses the changes that CFTC made in response to the internal review and whether these changes had their intended effect. Because CFTC lacked data that could be used to assess the impact of the changes, GAO (1) provides information on the changes made to the division, including the views of enforcement staff on areas in which such changes were made; (2) identifies further opportunities for improvement in these areas; and (3) provides other available information that might indicate CFTC's commitment to its enforcement program.

Securities Market Operations:

The Effects of SOES on the Nasdaq Market

GAO/GGD-98-194, Aug. 31 (41 pages).

Financial Audit: Other Matters Identified During GAO's 1997 [FDIC] Financial Statement Audits. GAO/AIMD-98-249R, Aug. 14.

Financial and Management Practices of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. GAO/NSIAD-98-239R, Aug. 28.

Financial and Management Practices of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission. GAO/NSIAD-98-240R, Aug. 28.

Financial Management: Accounting Implications of DOD's Facilities Demolition Programs. GAO/AIMD-98-194R, Aug. 28.

Government Operations

Regulatory Management: Implementation of Selected OMB Responsibilities Under the Paperwork Reduction Act

GAO/GGD-98-120, July 9 (37 pages).

The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 established the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within the Office of Management and Budget to provide central agency leadership and oversight of governmentwide efforts to reduce unnecessary paperwork burden and improve the management of information resources. However, by the end of fiscal year 1995, federal agencies' annual paperwork burden-hour estimates had risen from about 1.5 billion hours in 1980 to about 6.9 billion hours. This report assesses how OIRA has implemented selected responsibilities assigned to it by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, which reaffirmed and expanded OIRA's paperwork reduction responsibilities. GAO examines (1) how OIRA reviews and controls paperwork, (2) OIRA's oversight of federal information resources management activities, and (3) how OIRA keeps Congress abreast of major activities under the act.

General Services Administration: Impact of Overestimation of Rental Revenue on the Federal Buildings Fund

GAO/GGD-98-183, Aug. 17 (21 pages).

This report reviews steps taken by the General Services Administration (GSA) in response to recent funding problems experienced by its Federal

This report examines the Small Order Execution System (SOES) and its effects on the Nasdaq Stock Market. SOES is a securities trading system that provides immediate automated executions of trades in the Nasdaq Market. GAO discusses (1) the extent to which the system is being used for its intended purpose, (2) the effects of SOES on the marketplace, (3) the results of attempts to limit trading on SOES or replace SOES, and (4) the effects of recent market developments and proposals affecting SOES.

Financial Management

Financial Audit: Capitol Preservation Fund's Fiscal Years 1997 and 1996 Financial Statements

GAO/AIMD-98-263, Aug. 31 (13 pages).

GAO audited the Capitol Preservation Fund's financial statements for fiscal years 1997 and 1996 and the related statements of activities and statements of cash flows for those years. The Fund is responsible for improving and preserving the United States Capitol as well as providing artwork and other items for display in the Capitol and other locations. GAO found that the financial statements were reliable in all material respects, that there were no material weaknesses in the internal controls GAO tested, and that there was no reportable noncompliance with laws and regulations.

Correspondence

Results of GAO's Assistance on Audit of U.S. Government Printing Office's Fiscal Year 1997 Financial Statements. GAO/AIMD-98-250R, Aug. 3.

Federally Chartered Corporation: Review of the Financial Statement Audit Report for the Legion of Valor of the United States of America, Incorporated, for Fiscal Year 1997. GAO/AIMD-98-259R, Aug. 7.

Federally Chartered Corporation: Review of the Financial Statement Audit Report for the National Ski Patrol System, Incorporated, for Fiscal Year 1997. GAO/AIMD-98-260R, Aug. 7.

Federally Chartered Corporation: Review of the Financial Statement Audit Report for the Military Order of the World Wars for Fiscal Year 1997. GAO/AIMD-98-261R, Aug. 7.

Buildings Fund. GAO (1) summarizes information it developed to verify, to the extent practical, the amounts GSA attributed to each reason for overestimation of the Fund's rental revenue projections for fiscal years 1996, 1997, and 1998; (2) discusses whether the Public Buildings Service's corrective actions appeared to address GSA's identified reasons for the overestimation; and (3) discusses the budgetary impact of the overestimation on projects and programs in the Fund.

**Federal Employees' Compensation Act:
Percentages of Take-Home Pay Replaced by Compensation Benefits**

GAO/GGD-98-174, Aug. 17 (45 pages).

This report provides information on workers' compensation benefits for lost wages provided to workers with job-related injuries under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act. GAO discusses (1) percentages of take-home pay that Act benefits replaced for beneficiaries on the long-term rolls who were receiving full benefits; (2) career patterns of workers in selected occupations that were that same as the occupations of Act beneficiaries, which might indicate the extent to which beneficiaries' injuries affected their career progression prospects; and (3) beneficiaries' characteristics, such as current age, age when injured, compensation benefits paid in 1997, and pay at the time of injury adjusted to 1997 pay levels.

**Currency Paper Procurement:
Meaningful Competition Unlikely Under Current Conditions**

GAO/GGD-98-181, Aug. 28 (124 pages).

Since 1879, virtually all paper purchased by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing for U.S. currency production has come from one supplier—Crane & Co. Although Crane has consistently provided quality paper, the Bureau at times was forced to pay prices it was unable to determine were fair and reasonable because it had no other U.S. source for paper. The Bureau's assessment of Crane's proposed prices were hampered by several factors, including the lack of market prices for currency paper and the limited analyses of proposed costs and prices it performed, especially on earlier contracts in GAO's sample. In addition, some Bureau practices, such as understating the quantities of currency paper needed, caused the government to pay more for currency paper than it should have. The Bureau is responsible for ensuring that the government's supply of paper

is not disrupted. Although no disruptions have occurred, the Bureau for many years did not maintain a reserve inventory of paper to provide for contingencies. As a result, it was more vulnerable to adverse consequences if a disruption had occurred and it was at a disadvantage in its contract negotiations because it lacked an alternative source for currency paper. The Bureau recently has been purchasing paper to build a three-month reserve supply and, under the law, could buy paper from a foreign source if no domestic source exists.

**Federal Rulemaking:
Agencies Often Published Final Actions Without Proposed Rules**

GAO/GGD-98-126, Aug. 31 (49 pages).

Federal agencies issue more than 4,000 regulatory actions each year on everything from the timing of bridge openings to the permissible levels of contaminants in drinking water. Agencies are required to (1) publish a notice of proposed rulemaking in the Federal Register; (2) allow interested persons an opportunity to provide “written data, views, or arguments;” and (3) publish the final rule 30 days before it becomes effective. Agencies are allowed to issue final rules without notices of proposed rulemaking in certain cases, such as when the agency determines for “good cause” that notice and comment procedures are “impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest.” GAO has previously reported that agencies have published a number of final regulatory actions without having published notices of proposed rulemaking. This report (1) identifies the extent to which agencies published final regulatory actions without notices of proposed rulemaking during 1997 and the characteristics of those cases, (2) describes the reasons that agencies gave for not publishing notices, and (3) discusses the implications of publishing final actions without notices of proposed rulemaking.

Testimony

District of Columbia: Extent to Which Schools Receive Available Federal Education Grants, by Carlotta C. Joyner, Director of Education and Employment Issues, before the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight. GAO/T-HEHS-98-239, Aug. 26 (eight pages).

The District of Columbia Public Schools is eligible for 72 of the 103 federal education grant programs available for preschool, elementary, and secondary education in fiscal year 1998. The District of Columbia applied

for 46 of the 72 federal programs. According to D.C. Public School officials, the District did not apply for the remaining 26 programs because it lacked the resources to pursue these grants. For example, budgetary constraints precluded its applying for grants requiring matching funds, such as Even Start-Migrant Education, and the D.C. Public Schools said that it had insufficient staff to apply for some grants or to implement the grant if received, such as Bilingual Education-Professional Development. The grant application process can vary by grant and involves several officials in the D.C. Public Schools and the District government.

Correspondence

Credit Cards: Intragovernmental Transfers and Related Concerns.
GAO/GGD-98-179R, Aug. 17.

Health

Medicare: Concerns With Physicians at Teaching Hospitals (PATH) Audits

GAO/HEHS-98-174, July 23 (35 pages).

About 1,200 hospitals in the United States have graduate medical education programs to train doctors in medical specialties after they have completed medical school. In December 1995, the University of Pennsylvania, without admitting wrongdoing, entered into a voluntary settlement with the Justice Department, agreeing to pay about \$30 million in disputed billings and damages for Medicare billings by teaching physicians. This settlement resulted from an audit done by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Concerned that such problems might be widespread, the OIG, in cooperation with the Justice Department, launched a nationwide initiative—now commonly known as Physicians at Teaching Hospitals (PATH) audits—to review teaching physician compliance with Medicare billing rules. As of April 1998, five additional PATH audits had been resolved, resulting in settlements, in three of these cases, totaling more than \$37 million. The PATH initiative has generated considerable controversy. The academic medical community disagrees with the OIG about the billing and documentation standards that were in effect during the periods under review. The medical community also contends that the Justice Department is coercing settlements from teaching institutions through threats of federal lawsuits. This report determines (1) whether the Department of Health and Human Services' OIG has a legal basis for conducting PATH audits, (2) whether the OIG has followed an acceptable

approach and methodology in conducting the audits, and (3) the significance of the billing problems cited in selected audits.

Medicare:

Application of the False Claims Act to Hospital Billing Practices

GAO/HEHS-98-195, July 10 (20 pages).

The Justice Department is using the False Claims Act, originally enacted during the Civil War to combat contract fraud, to deal with cases in which hospitals improperly bill Medicare. Justice's use of the False Claims Act includes two major multistate initiatives involving hospitals: the 72-Hour Window Project and the Lab Unbundling Project. The 72-Hour Window Project investigates whether hospitals have separately billed Medicare for outpatient services covered by the Medicare inpatient payment, such as preadmission tests done within 72 hours of admission. Hospitals that do so are, in effect, double-billing Medicare. The Lab Unbundling Project investigates whether hospitals have billed Medicare separately for each blood test done concurrently on automated equipment or billed Medicare for medically unnecessary tests. Under the 72-Hour Window Project, about 3,000 hospitals received demand letters for recovery of overpayments, and about \$58 million had been recovered as of April 1998.

Health Insurance for Children:

Private Individual Coverage Available, but Choices Can Be Limited and Costs Vary

GAO/HEHS-98-201, Aug. 5 (16 pages).

In 1996, nearly 10.6 million children in America lacked health insurance. Most of these children were from poor, working families. In some cases, the children were ineligible for Medicaid or other public programs or their parents did not receive health insurance coverage from their jobs. In response to congressional interest in the availability of private sector health coverage for children in the individual insurance market, GAO reviewed the availability and characteristics of these products. GAO found that private health insurance is available for almost all children, but sales of these policies account for only a small share of individual insurance policy sales—from under one percent to 20 percent among insurance carriers GAO contacted. Moreover, because many carriers tend to avoid states with certain regulatory requirements, consumers may have a more limited choice of benefit plans and carriers in these states. Costs vary

widely, as with adult policies, and children can be denied coverage, or charged higher rates, for existing conditions. Two carriers that market specifically to children do not cover babies because of the high cost of early preventive care and the lack of information about a child's possible future health problems.

Testimony

Medicare: Interim Payment System for Home Health Agencies, by William J. Scanlon, Director of Health Financing and Systems Issues, before the Subcommittee on Health, House Committee on Ways and Means. GAO/T-HEHS-98-234, Aug. 6 (eight pages).

A well-designed prospective payment system is the best way for Medicare to rationally control home health spending. Until such a system is implemented, however, the interim payment system will help constrain the growth in outlays. Yet concerns have been raised about the interim payment system. Specifically, the industry doubts whether payments will be adequate and whether the payment limits will adequately account for differences in patient mix and treatment patterns across agencies. Another concern is that inefficient providers will have unduly high limits because the limits are based on historic payments that reflect inappropriate practices. GAO and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General have previously reported that Medicare has been billed for home health visits that may not have been needed, were inconsistent with Medicare policies, or were not even delivered. Thus, concerns about the overall adequacy of payments under the interim system may be unwarranted because the limits were based on historic costs, a portion of which were unreliable. Whether the payments to individual agencies will reflect legitimate differences across agencies is more difficult to determine.

Correspondence

Federal Health Programs: Comparison of Medicare, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, Medicaid, Veterans' Health Services, Department of Defense Health Services, and Indian Health Services. GAO/HEHS-98-231R, Aug. 7.

Housing

Section 8 Housing Assistance: HUD to Recapture \$439 Million of Excess Funding in the Moderate Rehabilitation Program

GAO/RCED-98-235, Aug. 25 (15 pages).

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Section 8 Assisted Housing Program provides rental subsidies for low-income families. Assistance is either tenant based (linked to specific households) or project based (linked to specific housing units). The Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program, a form of project-based assistance run by state and local housing agencies under contract with HUD, was created to upgrade privately owned housing in need of moderate rehabilitation. This report, the third in a series, provides information on (1) the amount of excess budget authority in the Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program and how HUD estimated this amount; (2) the accuracy of HUD's estimate; and (3) HUD's plans for recapturing this excess budget authority from housing agencies.

Testimony

Community Development: The American Community Renewal Act of 1998, by Stanley J. Czerwinski, Associate Director for Housing and Community Development Issues, before the House Committee on Small Business, in Chicago, Illinois. GAO/T-RCED-98-263, Aug. 19 (eight pages).

H.R. 3865, the American Community Renewal Act of 1998, would allow 100 areas to be designated as "renewal" communities, enabling them to receive incentives to increase jobs, form and expand small businesses, and increase educational opportunities and homeownership. To be eligible for such a designation, an area must meet economic distress criteria that measure unemployment and poverty rates. Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, authorized by the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993 and the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, also seek to revitalize economically distressed areas. This testimony identifies the number of census tracts that meet the economic distress criteria of H.R. 3865. GAO also discusses its December 1996 report (GAO/RCED-97-21) on six urban Empowerment Zones that described the program's early implementation, including factors that participants believed may have either helped or hindered efforts to carry out the program. These lessons may be helpful in considering H.R. 3865.

Income Security

Social Security: Different Approaches for Addressing Program Solvency

GAO/HEHS-98-33, July 22 (98 pages).

The aging of the baby boomers, lower fertility rates, and increasing longevity have eroded the long-term solvency of the Social Security program. The system's annual cash surpluses are now projected to decline substantially beginning around 2008, and by 2013, benefit payments are expected to exceed cash revenues. The Social Security Trust Funds are forecast to be depleted by 2032, at which time revenues will be able to pay no more than 75 percent of promised benefits. With a national debate underway on how best to resolve Social Security's long-term financing problems, GAO reviewed the various perspectives underlying the solvency debate, reform options within the current program structure, and issues that would arise if Social Security were restructured to include individual retirement accounts.

Social Security: Implications of Extending Mandatory Coverage to State and Local Employees

GAO/HEHS-98-196, Aug. 18 (27 pages).

The Social Security Act of 1935 excluded state and local government employees from coverage because of concerns about the federal government's right to impose a tax on state governments and because many state and local employees were already covered by public pension plans. Over the years, Congress has extended mandatory Social Security coverage to workers not covered by a public pension plan and voluntary coverage to other state and local government workers. The Social Security Administration estimates that 5 million state and local government workers, with annual salaries totaling \$132.5 million, are currently not covered by Social Security. This report examines the implications of extending mandatory coverage to all newly hired state and local employees. Specifically, GAO discusses the implications of mandatory coverage for the Social Security program and for public employers, employees, and pension plans. GAO also identifies potential legal or administrative problems associated with mandatory coverage.

Social Security:

Mass Issuance of Counterfeit-Resistant Cards Expensive, but Alternatives Exist

GAO/HEHS-98-170, Aug. 20 (30 pages).

Since legislation was enacted in 1986 requiring employers to review documents of prospective employees to establish their right to work in the United States, the Social Security card has become one of the primary documents used to determine employment eligibility. However, concerns have deepened that the card is easily counterfeited and does not prevent individuals from illegally working in the United States. As a result, some Members of Congress have asked, on several occasions, the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to estimate the cost of issuing a counterfeit-resistant card. In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act required SSA to develop a prototype counterfeit-resistant card made of a durable tamper-resistant material with various security features that could be used to establish reliable proof of citizenship or legal noncitizenship status. That Act also required SSA and GAO to estimate and compare the cost of producing and disseminating several types of enhanced cards to all living number holders over 3-, 5-, and 10-year periods. Earlier that year, a Member of Congress asked CBO to estimate the cost of issuing a counterfeit-resistant card, believing an earlier SSA estimate of producing such a card was high. This report (1) explains differences in CBO's and SSA's estimates for replacing the Social Security card, (2) evaluates SSA's estimates for the cost of issuing a more secure card, and (3) presents additional issuance options.

Railroad Retirement:

Enhancing Portability Would Raise Cost and Policy Concerns

GAO/GGD-98-168, Aug. 10 (24 pages).

The railroad retirement program, established in 1937, is among the older retirement programs for private sector employees in the country. In 1997, the program had 254,000 active participants and provided pension benefits to 742,000 retirees, spouses, and survivor and disability annuitants. During the past 30 years, the railroad industry has experienced extensive downsizing. Also, about 60 percent of railroad workers leave the industry with less service than they need to qualify for a pension under the program. Consequently, there has been discussion of possible legislation

to enhance the portability of railroad retirement benefits. This report discusses (1) which, if any, railroad retirement benefits are portable; (2) what changes could be made to the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS) that might enhance the portability of railroad retirement benefits into FERS for former railroad employees who secure federal jobs and the cost and administrative implications of those changes for FERS and whether such changes could be made cost-neutral to FERS; and (3) what changes could be made to railroad retirement that might enhance the overall portability of its retirement benefits and what are the cost and administrative implications of these changes for railroad retirement.

Correspondence

SSA: The Agency's Relationship with the Office of Management and Budget Since Becoming an Independent Agency. GAO/HEHS-98-235R, Aug. 26.

Information Management

Year 2000 Computing Crisis: State Department Needs to Make Fundamental Improvements to Its Year 2000 Program

GAO/AIMD-98-162, Aug. 28 (28 pages).

The State Department has taken many positive steps to increase awareness, promote sharing of information, and encourage its bureaus to make Year 2000 remediation efforts a high priority. However, State's progress in responding to the problem has been slow. For example, of the 40 systems that State identified as mission critical and needing either converting or replacement, only 17—about 42.5 percent—have completed renovation. More importantly, until recently, State's Year 2000 effort lacked a mission-based perspective. That is, it had not determined its core business functions or linked these functions to its mission or to the support systems necessary to conduct these operations. Because the Year 2000 problem is primarily a business problem, agencies need to take a business perspective—identifying their core business areas and processes and assessing the impact of system failures. Until it takes these steps, State will not be in a good position to prioritize its systems for the purposes of correction or developing contingency plans that focus on the continuity of operations. Finally, State has not been managing the identification and correction of its interfaces effectively. As a result, State has increased the chance that Year 2000 errors will be propagated from one organization's systems to another's.

**Defense Information Superiority:
Progress Made, but Significant Challenges Remain**

GAO/NSIAD/AIMD-98-257, Aug. 31 (27 pages).

In 1996, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a conceptual framework for the military's war fighting. Known as Joint Vision 2010, the document identifies information superiority over the enemy as essential. The Defense Department (DOD) defines information superiority as "the capability to collect, process, and disseminate an uninterrupted flow of information while exploiting or denying an adversary's ability to do the same." DOD believes that information superiority can provide significant advantages over the enemy during a conflict and increase the efficiency of peacetime and wartime operations. However, greater reliance on information systems may also make DOD vulnerable to computer attacks and intrusions, damaging its war-fighting capability. This report evaluates DOD's progress in implementing key information superiority activities. GAO examines DOD's progress in establishing a DOD-wide architecture for the information systems known as Command, Control, Communications, Computers (C4), Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems; developing and implementing the Global Command and Control System; and establishing the Joint Tactical Radio System.

Testimony

FAA Systems: Serious Challenges Remain in Resolving Year 2000 and Computer Security Problems, by Joel C. Willemssen, Director of Civil Agencies Information Systems Issues, before the Subcommittee on Technology, House Committee on Science. GAO/T-AIMD-98-251, Aug. 6 (32 pages).

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has made progress in managing its Year 2000 problem and has completed critical steps in defining which systems need to be fixed and how to fix them. However, with less than 17 months to go, FAA must still correct, test, and implement many of its mission-critical systems. It is doubtful whether FAA can adequately do all of this in the time remaining. Accordingly, FAA must determine how to ensure continuity of critical operations in the likely event of some system failures. GAO also notes that FAA cannot ensure that the air traffic control systems on which it depends are sufficiently resistant to intrusion. Underlying weaknesses in FAA's management have allowed the agency's Year 2000, computer security, and other information technology problems to persist. The underlying causes of some of these long-standing problems

include an incomplete systems architecture, poor software acquisition capabilities, unreliable cost information, and a problematic organizational culture. Although FAA has taken steps in response to GAO's recommendations, most of them have not been fully implemented.

Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Strong Leadership and Partnerships Needed to Mitigate Risk of Major Disruptions, by Joel C. Willemssen, Director of Civil Agencies Information Systems Issues, before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology, House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, in New York City. GAO/T-AIMD-98-262, Aug. 13 (25 pages); and

Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Strong Leadership and Partnerships Needed to Address Risk of Major Disruptions, by Joel C. Willemssen, Director of Civil Agencies Information Systems Issues, before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology, House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, in Dallas, Texas. GAO/T-AIMD-98-266, Aug. 17 (27 pages); and

Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Avoiding Major Disruptions Will Require Strong Leadership and Effective Partnerships, by Joel C. Willemssen, Director of Civil Agencies Information Systems Issues, before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology, House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, in New Orleans, Louisiana. GAO/T-AIMD-98-267, Aug. 19 (25 pages).

Because of the potentially devastating impact of the Year 2000 problem on critical government operations, GAO has included this issue on its list of high-risk government areas. (See GAO/HR-97-9, Feb. 1997.) Since then, GAO has issued more than 50 reports and congressional testimonies on the Year 2000 readiness of a host of federal agencies. GAO has also issued guidance to help organizations successfully deal with this issue. This testimony discusses the Year 2000 risks confronting the nation, highlights GAO's major concerns with the federal government's progress in fixing its systems, identifies state and local government Year 2000 issues, and discusses critical Year 2000 data exchange issues.

Correspondence

Internal Revenue Service: Impact of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act on Year 2000 Efforts. GAO/GGD-98-158R, Aug. 4.

Year 2000 Computing: EFT [Electronic Funds Transfer] 99 Is Not Expected to Affect Year 2000 Remediation Efforts. GAO/AIMD-98-272R, Aug. 28.

Justice and Law Enforcement

Immigration Statistics: Guidance on Producing Information on the U.S. Resident Foreign-Born

GAO/GGD-98-155, July 22 (28 pages).

The makeup of the foreign-born population living in the United States continues to interest policymakers as they debate immigration issues. These policymakers have expressed concern that the information needed to make informed decisions on immigration policy either has been unavailable or inadequate. This report, one in a series, identifies federal guidance on the production of demographic information on foreign-born residents and provides information on agencies' status relative to that guidance. GAO (1) identifies the federal guidance available to the agencies responsible for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information on the foreign-born and (2) provides information that compares the agencies to federal guidance on independence, capacity to provide information, and efforts to coordinate the production of information, which includes statistical data on the foreign-born.

Customs Service: Inspectional Personnel and Workloads

GAO/GGD-98-170, Aug. 14 (19 pages).

Members of Congress asked GAO to analyze (1) the implications of any differences between the levels of cargo and passenger inspectors at certain airports and seaports around the United States and the levels determined by the U.S. Customs Service to be appropriate for these ports and (2) any differences among the cargo and passenger processing workload-to-inspector ratios at the selected ports and the rationales for any significant differences in these ratios. GAO could not perform the requested analyses because Customs has not assessed the level of appropriate staffing at its ports and because of concerns about the quality of Customs' workload data. In addition, Customs considered factors other than workload, such as budget constraints and legislative limitations, in determining its needs for inspectors and allocating them to ports. According to Customs officials, these factors must be considered in their

decisionmaking in order to maximize the effectiveness of deployed resources. On the basis of statements from senior Customs officials and their responses to earlier GAO recommendations, GAO believes that Customs recognizes that staffing imbalances may exist at certain ports and that it needs to improve how it assesses the need for and allocates inspectors to ports of entry. GAO summarized this report in testimony before Congress; see:

Customs Service: Inspectional Personnel and Workloads, by Norman J. Rabkin, Director of Administration of Justice Issues, before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology, House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight. GAO/T-GGD-98-195, Aug. 14 (six pages).

**Customs Service:
Internal Control Weaknesses Over Deletion of Certain Law
Enforcement Records**

GAO/GGD-98-187, Aug. 21 (12 pages).

The U.S. Customs Service lacked adequate controls over the deletion of lookout records, which identify persons and vehicles known or suspected of illegal activity, in the Treasury Enforcement Communications System. The system is designed to enable Customs inspectors to compare records containing lookout data with persons and vehicles entering the United States during primary screening inspections at ports of entry. Standards issued by the Comptroller General require that (1) key duties and responsibilities in authorizing, processing, recording, and reviewing transactions should be separated among individuals; (2) internal control systems and all transactions and other significant events should be clearly documented, and the documentation should be readily available for examination; and (3) supervisors should continuously review and approve the assigned work of their staffs. However, Customs guidance on the Treasury Enforcement Communications System does not require these safeguards, and Customs officials at the three ports GAO visited had not implemented these controls. As a result, Customs employees could inappropriately remove lookout records from the System. GAO recommends that Customs develop and implement guidance and standards to help ensure adequate internal controls over the deletion of lookout records.

National Defense

Navy Aircraft Carriers: Cost-Effectiveness of Conventionally and Nuclear-Powered Carriers

GAO/NSIAD-98-1, Aug. 27 (192 pages).

GAO's analysis shows that conventional and nuclear aircraft carriers both have been effective in fulfilling U.S. forward presence, crisis response, and war-fighting requirements and share many characteristics and capabilities. However, costs for investment, operations and support, and inactivation and disposal are greater for nuclear-powered carriers than for conventionally powered carriers. Life-cycle costs for conventionally powered and nuclear-powered carriers—for a 50-year service life—are estimated at \$14.1 billion and \$22.2 billion, respectively. The United States maintains a continuous presence in the Pacific region by homeporting a conventionally powered carrier in Japan. If the Navy switches to an all nuclear carrier force, it would need to homeport a nuclear-powered carrier there to maintain the current level of worldwide overseas presence with a 12-carrier force. Homeporting a nuclear-powered carrier in Japan could prove difficult and costly because of the need for support facilities, infrastructure improvements, and additional personnel. The United States would need a larger carrier force if it wanted to maintain a similar level of presence in the Pacific region with nuclear-powered carriers homeported in the United States.

Defense Spending: Trends and Geographical Distribution of Prime Contract Awards and Compensation

GAO/NSIAD-98-195, Aug. 12 (27 pages).

Military spending on prime contracts, from weapons research and development to construction projects, has for years been concentrated among a handful of states. In 1997, four states—California, Virginia, Texas, and Florida—accounted for 40 percent, or \$81 billion, of all Defense Department prime contract awards and compensation. Between 1988 and 1997, changes in the prime contract awards occurred throughout the United States. California experienced the largest decrease. States with the largest decreases had major reductions in prime contracts for equipment. In some states, gains in prime contracts for services lessened the impact of significant decreases in equipment prime contracts.

**Acquisition Management:
Workforce Reductions and Contractor Oversight**

GAO/NSIAD-98-127, July 31 (18 pages).

The Defense Department's acquisition workforce is decreasing slightly faster than the overall military workforce. From 1993 through 1997, the overall number of DOD personnel fell 17.5 percent. During the same period, civilian personnel in DOD's acquisition workforce decreased 24 percent, while military personnel in the acquisition workforce decreased by 28 percent. Since 1993, the two organizations directly associated with contractor oversight—the Defense Contract Audit Agency and the Defense Contract Management Command—experienced personnel reductions of roughly 19 and 27 percent, respectively.

**Defense Inventory:
Action Needed to Avoid Inappropriate Sales of Surplus Parts**

GAO/NSIAD-98-182, Aug. 3 (27 pages).

Lax compliance by the Defense Department with its own disposal policies and procedures has resulted in the inadvertent sale to the public of surplus parts with sensitive military technology intact. These sales occurred for three reasons. First, the military assigned the wrong demilitarization codes to the parts. Second, an initiative intended to correct inaccurately assigned demilitarization codes did not ensure that data systems were updated with the corrected codes. Third, the methods that the disposal offices used to demilitarize some parts did not adequately destroy the military technology they contained. At the same time, DOD has made slow and uneven progress in implementing initiatives to prevent the sale of dangerous aircraft parts to the public.

**Chemical and Biological Defense:
DOD's Evaluation of Improved Garment Materials**

GAO/NSIAD-98-214, Aug. 18 (18 pages).

This report examines the Defense Department's (DOD) programs to develop improved chemical defense garment materials for U.S. armed forces to determine whether the programs were conducted fairly. A company claims that it did not have an opportunity to submit an improved material for evaluation and that requirements changed in the transition

from the Marine Corps Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology Program to the Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology Program. GAO discusses whether, in the research and development context, DOD (1) provided enough notice to industry of the government's interest in identifying improved chemical defense materials, (2) provided industry enough opportunity to participate in the programs, and (3) changed requirements in the transition from the Marine Corps to the Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology Programs. GAO also discusses DOD's response to a recent congressional reporting requirement concerning sources of supply for the military's chemical defense materials.

Correspondence

NATO: Status of JSTARS and Alternatives to Meet the Alliance Ground Surveillance Requirement. GAO/NSIAD-98-233R, Aug. 13.

1999 DOD Budget: DOD's Procurement and RDT&E Programs. GAO/NSIAD-98-216R, Aug. 14.

Civilian Marksmanship Program: U.S. Army Investigation of Alleged Criminal Activity in Program. GAO/OSI-98-14R, Aug. 18.

Natural Resources

National Park Service: The Condition of Lodging Facilities Varies Among Selected Parks

GAO/RCED-98-238, Aug. 6 (63 pages).

The National Park Service offers visitors to the national parks a range of overnight accommodations, from deluxe to economy rooms. In some cases, these are the only lodging facilities available in or near a park. Concessioners manage these lodging facilities under contracts with the Park Service. When evaluated by common industry standards, the condition of lodging facilities in national parks varies. Some facilities, such as those in Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks, are in very good shape, while others, including some structures at Stovepipe Wells in Death Valley National Park, are in need of substantial renovation. The Park Service has standards for lodging facilities located in national parks and, in general, formally evaluates the condition of these facilities at least twice a year. If problems are found, follow-up inspections are done to determine if the deficiencies were corrected. A final evaluation of a concessioner's performance is also done at the end of the year. The Park Service's and industry standards for inspecting lodging facilities are similar; however,

industry standards require additional amenities, furnishings, safety, and security.

Testimony

Federal Lands: Wildfire Preparedness and Suppression Expenditures for Fiscal Years 1993 Through 1997, by Barry T. Hill, Associate Director for Energy, Resources, and Science Issues, before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, House Committee on Resources. GAO/T-RCED-98-247, Aug. 4 (17 pages).

Federal land management agencies spent about \$4.4 billion on wildfire activities in fiscal years 1993 through 1997, including \$2.1 billion for preparedness efforts and \$2.3 billion for wildfire suppression. For fiscal years 1993 through 1997, the five land management agencies provided assistance to state and local firefighting efforts through cooperative agreements, provided grants valued at about \$83 million, and loaned excess federal property worth about \$700 million. Wildlife preparedness expenditures rose slightly during this period because, by their very nature, they can be planned, while suppression expenditures varied greatly because they are linked to the number and intensity of wildfires in a given year.

Social Services

Welfare Reform: Child Support an Uncertain Income Supplement for Families Leaving Welfare

GAO/HEHS-98-168, Aug. 3 (36 pages).

Many families who exhaust time-limited welfare benefits may not be able to count on child support as a steady source of income. In the first three states to enforce time limits—Connecticut, Florida, and Virginia—only 20 to 40 percent of the families had any child support collected for them in the 12 months before their welfare benefits ended. One-half or more of the child support cases without collections lacked a child support order legally obligating a noncustodial parent to pay child support at the time that the families' welfare benefits ended, despite a long history in the child support program before time limits were introduced. To ensure that child support is available to families in a welfare system with time limits, states will need to do a better job securing child support payments for families already in the welfare system and for those entering it for the first time.

Tax Policy and Administration

Tax Administration: IRS' Telephone Routing Interactive System May Not Meet Expectations

GAO/GGD-98-152, July 13 (28 pages).

Improving service to taxpayers is one of the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) highest priorities. IRS' "Customer Service Vision" calls for IRS to reduce written correspondence and walk-in contacts with taxpayers and serve more taxpayers over the phone. One of the ways IRS planned to improve telephone access was through the use of the telephone routing interactive system, which directs taxpayer calls to difference sources of assistance, including customer service representatives, recorded messages on various topics, and interactive applications. Although GAO reported earlier that IRS had significantly improved accessibility, the improvements resulted primarily from increasing the number of employees who were able to help taxpayers rather than many more taxpayers being served by interactive applications. (See GAO/GGD-98-33, Dec. 1997.) This report discusses (1) taxpayers' use of the telephone routing interactive systems' applications and (2) the system's expected benefits as presented in IRS' business case.

Earned Income Credit: IRS' Tax Year 1994 Compliance Study and Recent Efforts to Reduce Noncompliance

GAO/GGD-98-150, July 28 (48 pages).

In April 1997, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) published the results of its tax year 1994 earned income credit compliance study. The study showed that of \$17.2 billion in earned income credit claimed during the study period, taxpayers overclaimed about \$4.4 billion—or 26 percent. This report (1) evaluates IRS' study methodology to determine if the reported results were reasonably accurate, (2) identifies the primary sources of earned income credit noncompliance found in the study, and (3) determines whether recent IRS compliance efforts are designed to address the primary sources of noncompliance.

Transportation

Aviation Safety: FAA's Use of Emergency Orders to Revoke or Suspend Operating Certificates

GAO/RCED-98-199, July 23 (40 pages).

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is responsible for examining and testing the qualifications of airmen, such as pilots, mechanics, and flight engineers, as well as those of aviation entities, such as airlines and airports, seeking a certificate to operate. When violations of the federal aviation regulations by certificate holders are detected, FAA can take a range of actions—from issuing warning letters to suspending or revoking operating certificates. Since the 1996 crashes of ValuJet Flight 592 and TWA Flight 800, FAA's oversight of the aviation community and the agency's enforcement actions in response to violations have come under greater scrutiny. Although some have criticized FAA for not responding swiftly or forcefully enough to safety violations, others have questioned its haste in using emergency orders to suspend or revoke the certificates that pilots, airlines, and others need to operate. GAO found that in three percent of the 137,506 enforcement cases closed in fiscal years 1990 through 1997, FAA used emergency orders to initiate action or revoke or suspend operating certificates. Most of the emergency orders revoked or suspended pilots' operating certificates or the certificates of their medical fitness to fly. In 1990, FAA decided that, for those cases in which revocations are based on a demonstrated lack of qualifications to hold the relevant certificate, the certificate generally should be revoked immediately and not after the lengthy appeal process that nonemergency certificate actions can be subject to. This shift in policy is reflected in the greater numbers of emergency actions that GAO observed. Although the use of emergency orders is intended to speed the handling of serious enforcement cases, the time needed for FAA to investigate violations and issue emergency orders varied widely, often taking several months or longer. During this time, the certificate holder could continue to operate, that is, to fly or repair aircraft and possibly pose a safety risk. GAO summarized this report in testimony before Congress; see:

Aviation Safety: FAA's Use of Emergency Orders to Revoke or Suspend Operating Certificates, by Gerald L. Dillingham, Associate Director for Transportation Issues, before the Subcommittee on Aviation, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. GAO/T-RCED-98-253, Aug. 6 (18 pages).

Correspondence

Air Traffic Control: Information Concerning Equipment Outages at Two Kansas City Area Facilities. GAO/RCED-98-256R, Aug. 14.

Veterans Affairs

**VA Health Care:
Better Integration of Services Could Improve Gulf War
Veterans' Care**

GAO/HEHS-98-197, Aug. 19 (40 pages).

The number of veterans who suffer from illnesses linked to the Persian Gulf War remains unknown. The primary difficulty in assessing the impact of such illnesses lies in the fact that the connection between the veterans' symptoms and the causes of those symptoms has not yet been identified scientifically. In response to various symptoms and illnesses reported by Gulf War veterans—from skin rashes to muscle and joint pain to memory loss—the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1992 launched a program to help them receive VA health care. This free diagnostic and referral process has two stages: (1) an initial medical history and a physical examination with basic laboratory testing and (2) if needed, further evaluation through specialist consultations and additional symptom-specific testing. However, VA's guidance on the evaluation and the diagnosis of Gulf War veterans is not being consistently implemented at some of its medical facilities. Some physicians do not do all of the symptom-specific tests recommended by VA, and although VA records indicate that thousands of veterans remain undiagnosed, only about 500 have been sent to referral centers for additional evaluations. Mandated personal counseling of veterans often does not take place, and the form letters sent to veterans following examinations do not always adequately explain test results or diagnoses, often leaving veterans frustrated and confused. In addition, in four of the six facilities GAO visited, veterans were not treated by the staff who performed the initial examinations but were instead referred to primary care physicians or teams for treatment. Primary care physicians typically do not specialize in the care and treatment of Gulf War veterans but rather are responsible for serving the general veteran population. VA's diagnostic and treatment problems are reflected in Gulf War veterans' general dissatisfaction with their health care. GAO's work suggests the need to develop and implement a health care process that includes integrating diagnostic services, treatment of symptoms and illnesses, evaluation of treatment, and periodic reevaluations of veterans whose illnesses remain undiagnosed.

**VA Health Care:
More Veterans Are Being Served, but Better Oversight Is Needed**

GAO/HEHS-98-226, Aug. 28 (60 pages).

In recent years, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched two major initiatives to change the way it manages its \$17 billion health care system. In fiscal year 1996, VA decentralized the management structure of its Veterans Health Administration, forming 22 veterans integrated service networks to coordinate the activities of hundreds of hospitals, outpatient clinics, nursing homes, and other facilities. VA expected the networks to improve efficiency and patient access. In April 1997, VA began to phase in the veterans equitable resource allocation system to distribute resources to the 22 networks. Previously, each medical center received and managed its own budget. Concerned that some networks would be forced to take significant cost-saving measures to manage with the diminished resources they would receive under the veterans equitable resource allocation system and that these networks would, as a result, reduce veterans' access to care, Congress asked GAO to examine changes in access to care in two networks—one headquartered in Bronx, New York, and one headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This report discusses (1) the changes in overall access to care, changes in access to certain specialized services, and a comparison of changes in these networks with VA's national data from fiscal years 1995 to 1997; (2) the extent to which VA headquarters and networks are working to equitably allocate resources to facilities within the networks; and (3) the adequacy of VA's oversight of changes in access to care.

Correspondence

Role of the Persian Gulf Veterans' Coordinating Board in Scientific Evaluation of Research Proposals and the Funding Recommendations Made by its Research Working Group. GAO/NSIAD-98-170R, Aug. 10.

Special Publications

**Year 2000 Computing Crisis:
Business Continuity and Contingency Planning**

GAO/AIMD-10.1.19, Aug. 1998 (21 pages).

Business continuity planning focuses on reducing the risk of Year 2000-induced business failures. It safeguards an agency's ability to produce a minimum acceptable level of outputs and services in the event of failures

of internal or external mission-critical information systems and services. Although it does not offer a long-term solution to Year 2000-induced failures, it will help the agency prepare for a potential crisis and may help restore normal services as quickly and cost-effectively as possible. This guide provides a conceptual framework to help large agencies manage the risk of Year 2000-induced disruptions to their operations. It provides information on the scope and the challenges and offers a structured approach to review the adequacy of agency Year 2000 business continuity and contingency planning efforts. The guide addresses four phases that are supported by program and project management activities: initiation, business impact analysis, contingency planning, and testing.

Reports on Agency Rules

GAO's Office of the General Counsel regularly issues legal decisions and opinions, reports on major rules issued by federal agencies prior to their implementation, and decisions resolving bid protests. These documents are posted daily and may be downloaded from GAO's home page on the World Wide Web (<http://www.gao.gov>).

The following is a list of reports on agency rules issued by the Office of the General Counsel. In addition to being available on the World Wide Web, these documents may be obtained by using the order form in the back of this publication. Bid protest decisions are not included in this list.

Department of Agriculture, Federal Crop Insurance Corporation: (1) General Administrative Regulations, Subpart U; and Catastrophic Risk Protection Endorsement; Regulations for the 1999 and Subsequent Reinsurance Years and (2) General Administrative Regulations, Subpart T—Federal Crop Insurance Reform, Insurance Implementation; Regulations for the 1999 and Subsequent Reinsurance Years; and the Common Crop Insurance Regulations; Basic Provisions; and Various Crop Insurance Provisions. GAO/OGC-98-69, Aug. 17.

Department of Health and Human Services, Health Care Financing Administration: Medicare Program; Changes to the Hospital Inpatient Prospective Payment Systems and Fiscal Year 1999 Rates. GAO/OGC-98-70, Aug. 14.

Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service:
Adjustment of Certain Fees of the Immigration Examinations Fee Account.
GAO/OGC-98-71, Aug. 25.

Federal Communications Commission: Maritime Communications.
GAO/OGC-98-66, Aug. 6.

Federal Communications Commission: Vehicle Monitoring Systems.
GAO/OGC-98-68, Aug. 14.

Securities and Exchange Commission: Interpretation of Section 206(3) of
the Investment Advisers Act of 1940. GAO/OGC-98-65, Aug. 5.

